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## Skidmore partner has idea for downtown casino site

If downtown Chicago is destined to get a casino, where should it go? One of this town's leading architectural citizens, **Adrian Smith**, design partner at **Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP**, has a surprising notion that he's raised with City Hall.

Smith said it should go beneath the elevated Wacker Drive east of Michigan Avenue. He said there's plenty of room down there for the 200,000 square feet or so that a first-class casino would require, plus parking. Furthermore, if the city were to own the casino, it wouldn't have to buy property since the land already is in the public domain.

The location would please downtown businesses that see little upside in gambling at **McCormick Place**. The site would be downtown, but literally tucked away in deference to those who think casin-

os are yucky. It makes as much sense, probably more, than the other sites under discussion.

Smith said he's discussed the idea with the mayor's staff but gotten no feedback. A critical issue would be the project's potential impact on the long-term **Lakeshore East** development of 4,900 homes at Wacker and Columbus. Smith is the project's lead designer. Some might wonder if a casino neighbor would scare off sales.

Four hotels in dice-rolling distance would benefit from the casino—the Sheraton, Swissotel, Fairmont and Hyatt Regency. The **Pritzker** family, which knows the gaming business, owns the Hyatt.

**SPACE SHOPPING:** The "office" market is improving. It's not, however, what you think. Office Depot Inc. and OfficeMax Inc., the two retailers whose names, stores and color schemes look very much the same, want to open stores in downtown Chicago. That's the word from **Allen Joffe**, principal at **Baum Realty Group Inc.**, who said he's been dealing with brokers working on behalf of the two chains. Office Depot has a store at 352 W. Grand, but both chains generally locate in malls or "power centers." An Office Depot spokesman said he knows of no planned openings in or near the Loop, but noted the chain has downtown stores in New York and Los Angeles. OfficeMax could not be reached.

**LOT LINES:** In their zest to sell new homes in tightly packed Chicago neighborhoods, developers are experimenting with lot sizes. **CA Development**, for example, has started marketing 27 homes in Edgewater on lots ranging from 37½-by-96 feet to 25-by-150 feet. The homes, on Rosehill west of Ashland, are priced at \$600,000 to \$700,000.

On Wrightwood west of Ashland in Lincoln Park, **David "Buzz" Ruttenberg's Belgravia Group Ltd.** has begun selling 23 single-family homes on 40-by-75-foot lots. They'll cost \$1.3 million to \$1.6 million. He's also selling 35 town houses priced from \$500,000 to \$800,000.

Both developers have excel-

lent track records. But I'm wondering who's serving buyers who want affordable city homes with real backyards.

**STREETERVILLE SALE:** A long-vacant parcel at the northwest corner of Ohio and Fairbanks has been sold to a suburban investor with development plans, said **Rick Levin**, the broker in the deal. Levin, of **Rick Levin & Associates Inc.**, said **Walgreen Co.** sold the property after deciding it didn't want to build there. The asking price was \$6.1 million but the sales figure was not disclosed. The unidentified buyer "definitely is thinking about going up" with a condo or hotel, Levin said.

**BULL OR BEAR?** Chicago-based **Equity Office Properties Trust**, the largest real estate investment trust that deals in offices, said Tuesday its gross leasing activity in April and May continued a solid pace the company set during the first quarter. Meanwhile, **Smith Barney** said insider sales of REIT stock surged in May, more than doubling the monthly average since the start of 2001. Among the big sellers were an Equity Office executive, **Christopher Mundy**, and a director, **Craig Vought**.

**CALENDAR NOTE:** **Jack Johnson**, director of government and community relations at McCormick Place, explains the convention center's expansion at a meeting of **Friends of Downtown**, 12:15 p.m. Thursday at the Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington. Wonder how he'll finesse the casino question.

**DOING THE DEALS:** **Albert Schulman** of **Paine/Wetzel Oncor International** brokered the sale of a 57,000-square-foot building at 1000 E. 87th St. to **Midway Broadcasting Corp.**, parent of radio station WVON. Midway is relocating operations from 3350 S. Kedzie. Property records show the sale was for \$950,000. The building is part of a larger complex that used to contain the base of **Soft Sheen Products**. A self-storage center and logistics firm now operate there. ... **NAI Hiffman** negotiated the lease of 94,000 square feet at 195 Schelter Road, Lincolnshire, to **XL Screw Corp.**